



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Elections

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 18, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In regard to the presidential elections held in Russia on March 14, the United States would like to reserve the right to offer a more conclusive assessment of their conduct of the elections after we have seen final reports from neutral monitors, including the mission fielded by ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Nonetheless, we share the concerns reflected in the election observation mission's preliminary conclusions that state controlled media, in particular the state-run TV channels, did not offer equal access and coverage to all candidates and that a vibrant political discourse and meaningful pluralism were lacking.

The United States does not believe that these problems had a decisive effect on the outcome of the vote. The re-election of President Putin clearly reflects the will of the Russian people. But we share the concerns expressed by many in Russia today about the potential danger of over-concentration of power in the Kremlin. We hope that, in his final term, President Putin will use his mandate to promote the growth of strong democratic institutions, including opposition political parties, a vibrant civil society, an independent national media and an independent judicial organs founded on the rule of law - that are the hallmarks of democratic states.

We would note that President Putin himself, on Russian television the night of the election, spoke of the need to, and here I quote: "strengthen institutions of democracy; that means to develop a multiparty system." Russia, he said, "should create the conditions in which parties of all orientation can develop so that everyone's voice can be heard on the country's political scene." We could not agree more.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.